

## Editorial

# Another Europe Is Possible

## *Our Common Security*

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation meets in Warsaw in July 2016. Amid much talk of ‘Russian aggression’, the Alliance will set out plans to deploy a ‘Russia-deterrent force in the Baltic and Black Sea regions’, according to *EU Observer*, while Montenegro’s application for membership will be approved.

The United States has already announced substantial increases in military expenditure in Europe to counter the ‘Russian threat’, while the Rand Corporation declares that the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania could be overrun in a matter of hours. President Putin remarks that Russia already has enough land (now including Crimea) and doesn’t want more. Meanwhile, Russia steps up its own military preparedness and expenditure, and is particularly sensitive about US military manoeuvres close to Kaliningrad, the Russian enclave on the Baltic Sea.

How is Europe’s common security to be safeguarded in this fraught and deepening confrontation? In the Sixteenth Century, Ivan IV (the ‘Terrible’) of Russia sought an alliance with England against Poland and Lithuania. Queen Elizabeth I had sent traders by sea to Muscovy where, it seems, they were courteously received. Russia would trade furs, timber and gold for military kit and artisans skilled in producing it. The pattern is a familiar one, and the significance of NATO’s choice of Warsaw for its 2016 Summit will not have been lost on Russia nor, for contrasting reasons, on neighbouring countries, many of which are former members of the Warsaw Pact. The Polish defence minister recently asserted that ‘all Russian behaviour attests to systematic preparation for aggressive action’. Meanwhile, war in Ukraine flares again, while further away in the southern Caucasus conflicts in Azerbaijan and Georgia go unresolved.

In the United Kingdom, there is a referendum on membership of the European Union, but not on that of NATO, the nuclear armed treaty organisation. In this issue of *The Spokesman*, Stuart Holland addresses democratic alternatives for a Europe prepared to go beyond austerity, while reminding us how European Nuclear Disarmament helped reverse the trend towards ‘theatre nuclear war’ in the 1980s. END, as it was known, helped to bring about the landmark Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, which outlaws a whole class of nuclear weapons. Perhaps with these precedents in mind, the International Peace Bureau convenes a World

Congress in Berlin at the end of September with the aim of creating an action agenda 'For a Climate of Peace'. Europe and the wider world are much in need of such initiatives.

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Germany's influential role in Eurasian developments underpinned events earlier in 2016. 'Berlin wasn't chosen by chance,' Yanis Varoufakis told *The Spokesman* at the launch of DiEM25 (short for Democracy in Europe Movement 2025) in February 2016. Of course, Germany is the dominant force in the European Union. In 2017, Germany has a general election as well as heading the G20 group of major economies. So, if you seek to build a political movement at the European level, as Mr Varoufakis avows, there are compelling reasons to announce it in Germany's thriving capital city.

Certainly, participation at DiEM's initial gathering was drawn from many of the European Union's 28 countries, including significant representation from the eastern '11' stretching from the Baltics into the Balkans, as well as core Europe (France, Germany, Belgium), southern Europe (Greece, of course, Italy, Portugal, Spain) including recently elected municipal representatives of 'rebel cities' such as Barcelona and Madrid, and vocal input from Ireland and, to a lesser extent, from the United Kingdom.

A generation or so earlier, in 1983, the European Nuclear Disarmament (END) Convention met in divided Berlin's vast International Congress Centre. This was a key moment in the mass campaign against the increasing threat of 'limited' nuclear war in Europe. The United States was deploying nuclear-armed cruise missiles on the territories of five western European members of NATO, including West Germany, which was also to host the super-fast Pershing II missiles. These latter weapons could strike targets in the Soviet Union in a matter of minutes. For its part, the USSR deployed mobile SS20 nuclear-armed missiles and other nuclear-armed munitions which could hit targets in western Europe. Germany was very much in the firing line, and the widespread unease this created, including in the military, is rather well captured in 'Deutschland 83', the hit, pro-NATO television drama.

Rather more significantly, the END Convention in Berlin raised the question of German reunification, much to the chagrin of the Soviet Peace Committee, which publicly denounced the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation and the END Conventions it helped organise. Six years later, in 1989, the Berlin Wall came down in the first of a series of 'velvet revolutions' across the countries of the soon-to-be-dissolved Warsaw Pact.

Berlin felt first hand the effect of these fundamental changes in European geopolitics.

Nowadays, Mr Varoufakis's emphasis is rightly on the European Union's denial of democracy, so that, for example, the popular will of the people of Greece against ever more austerity is ignored and traduced by the debilitating actions of the European Commission, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund, acting as a 'Troika'; a Russian word meaning 'set of three'.

DiEM launched itself in the Volksbühne (People's Theatre), not far from Alexanderplatz, once the centre of East Berlin. Atop the Volksbühne, a huge red banner was emblazoned with the Russian word 'nadriv', meaning 'anguish', reinforced by two large exclamation marks. Tsar Alexander the First visited Berlin in 1805, as Europe was convulsed by the Napoleonic Wars, to promote conservative alliances with Austria, Prussia and Britain against revolutionary France. Alexanderplatz was named in his honour, and the Russian flag still flutters over the massive Russian Embassy in nearby Unter den Linden, not far from the Brandenburg Gate.

So it is that geography as well as history continue to bind Russia and Germany, Europe's two largest economies. However, the first mention of Russia in DiEM's day of deliberations came in connection with Edward Snowden and his accidental safe haven there. Snowden and Julian Assange, who participated by video link in DiEM's public launch, have done much to reveal, via Wikileaks, how our world is run. Their commitment to transparency is reflected in DiEM's call for live-streaming of European Council meetings and related gatherings and actions. Might increased public scrutiny help to avert calamitous EU foreign policy initiatives such as the association agreement with Ukraine, which excludes Russia?

In April 2016, an advisory referendum on the European Union's association agreement with Ukraine was triggered in The Netherlands by popular demand, and the electorate voted against by almost two to one on a turnout of just over 30 per cent. The Dutch Government is obliged to take note of the outcome, which it had not sought. The Dutch referendum didn't figure in DiEM's day conference in Berlin. Indeed, there was little or no discussion of the EU's foreign policy and its troubled relationship with Russia, our close neighbour to the east.

Mass flight of refugees from Syria and elsewhere did figure in the press conference which preceded the day's discussions. Mr Varoufakis, Europe's best known finance minister, albeit he held the post only a few months, fielded questions about the tens of thousands of refugees then seeking safe

harbour in Greece, the European Union's most proximate state to the Middle East. The previous day, Chancellor Merkel had been in Turkey meeting Prime Minister Davutoğlu and President Erdoğan. She complained how mostly Russian bombardments were driving new waves of refugees from northern Syria towards the border with Turkey. Meanwhile, the talks in Geneva between the Syrian government and its opponents teeter on the brink of collapse, while the ceasefire in Syria itself barely holds amidst daily breaches. During five long years, Syrians have died in their hundreds of thousands. Urgent humanitarian relief has been reaching some besieged communities. However, at the time of writing, Syria remains on a knife-edge, with continued killing and destruction combined with alarming signs of preparation for more armed intervention by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and others.

The geopolitics of this desperate situation didn't figure much in DiEM's day of discussion. Mr Varoufakis rightly pointed to the European Union's failure to address the mass migration as a collective, instead expecting Greece, Italy, Malta and other countries of arrival to deal with the huge influxes of people. Since then, the EU has entered into a shaming deal with Turkey that effectively denies the rights of refugees under international law. Non-governmental organisations such as the Red Cross have suspended co-operation with the incarceration of refugees in camps in Greece. Further to the west, when some 500 people were drowned whilst attempting to cross the Mediterranean from Libya to Italy in April 2016, news coverage of this major tragedy was alarmingly small.

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George Soros, the man who 'broke the Bank of England' on 'Black Wednesday' in 1992, has been explicit about Europe's precarious state. In an interview entitled 'The EU is on the verge of collapse' (*New York Review of Books*, 20.1.16), Mr Soros commented:

'... There is plenty to be nervous about. As she [Chancellor Merkel] correctly predicted, the EU is on the verge of collapse. The Greek crisis taught the European authorities the art of muddling through one crisis after another. This practice is popularly known as kicking the can down the road, although it would be more accurate to describe it as kicking a ball uphill so that it keeps rolling back down. The EU now is confronted with not one but five or six crises at the same time.

**Schmitz:** To be specific, are you referring to Greece, Russia, Ukraine, the coming British referendum, and the migration crisis?

**Soros:** Yes. And you haven't even mentioned the root cause of the migration crisis: the conflict in Syria. Nor have you mentioned the unfortunate effect that the terrorist attacks in Paris and elsewhere have had on European public opinion.

Merkel correctly foresaw the potential of the migration crisis to destroy the European Union. What was a prediction has become the reality. The European Union badly needs fixing. This is a fact but it is not irreversible. And the people who can stop Merkel's dire prediction from coming true are actually the German people. I think the Germans, under the leadership of Merkel, have achieved a position of hegemony. But they achieved it very cheaply. Normally hegemony has to look out not only for their own interests, but also for the interests of those who are under their protection. Now it's time for Germans to decide: do they want to accept the responsibilities and the liabilities involved in being the dominant power in Europe?'

This shrewd assessment was soon followed by another of Mr Soros' Russophobe outbursts. Writing in *The Guardian* (11.2.16), he declared:

'The leaders of the US and the EU are making a grievous error in thinking that president Vladimir Putin's Russia is a potential ally in the fight against Islamic State. The evidence contradicts them. Putin's aim is to foster the EU's disintegration, and the best way to do so is to flood Europe with Syrian refugees.'

This alarming if improbable theme was taken up by the *Financial Times*, which spoke of Russia and President Putin 'weaponising' the refugee issue.

'Our fragmenting Europe and DiEM's Response' was the theme of the morning's discussion in Berlin in February. Peace-building is difficult enough in the fraught state of regional affairs in the Mediterranean area, compounded by the simmering conflict in Ukraine. Many of those attending DiEM's birth in Berlin would probably be sympathetic to including this strand in the discussions. In fact, an SPD member of the Bundestag raised the distorting effect of increased defence spending to meet the US-set target of two per cent of gross domestic product. This was during the afternoon session on 'economic analysis and policy framework', chaired by Stuart Holland, whose article we feature.

Just as it needs democracy, so Europe needs its peace movement to find their voice. A major opportunity to do so will arise in Berlin in the autumn.